

# ASTHMA, OCCUPATIONAL

## CONDITION REPORTING

### ***Purpose of reporting and surveillance***

- To describe the prevalence and incidence of work-related asthma.
- To characterize the distribution of work-related asthma across occupation, industry, and region.
- To identify causative agents and factors.
- To discover and investigate potential clusters.
- To develop and implement prevention strategies.

### ***Reporting requirements***

- Health care providers: notifiable within one month to Washington State Department of Labor and Industries' Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention (SHARP) program
- Hospitals: notifiable within one month to Washington State Department of Labor and Industries' SHARP program
- Laboratories: no requirements for reporting
- Local health jurisdictions: educate health care providers regarding reporting requirements to the State

### ***Reporting Mechanisms***

Case reports can be submitted several ways:

- Over the phone by calling 1-888-66-SHARP. An automated voice-messaging system can receive case reports 24-hours a day.
- By faxing a completed case reporting form to SHARP at 360-902-5672.
- By mailing a completed case reporting form to the SHARP Program, PO Box 44330, Olympia WA 98504-4330.

Case reporting forms can be downloaded at:  
[www.lni.wa.gov/sharp/reportable/Asthma.htm](http://www.lni.wa.gov/sharp/reportable/Asthma.htm)

## CASE DEFINITION FOR SURVEILLANCE

### ***Clinical criteria for diagnosis***

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways characterized by reversible airway obstruction or hyperresponsiveness. Symptoms of asthma include episodic wheezing, chest tightness, cough, and difficulty breathing. The diagnosis of work-related

asthma requires a complete clinical and occupational history, as well as objective testing to both diagnose asthma and attribute the onset or exacerbation of asthma to workplace exposures. The diagnosis of work-related asthma should be considered in patients with adult-onset asthma or asthma that worsens during adulthood.

**Case definition**

Any diagnosed or suspected case of asthma that is caused by or exacerbated by workplace exposures.

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**A. DESCRIPTION****1. Identification**

In general, the clinical presentation of work-related asthma is similar to asthma of non-occupational origin. Symptoms include episodic wheezing, chest tightness, cough, and difficulty breathing. Patterns of association between asthma symptoms and workplace exposures can be quite variable. Patients with immunologic or sensitizer-induced asthma may develop symptoms months or even years after exposure onset. In these patients, asthmatic responses may occur less than an hour (early response) to several hours (late response) following inhalation of the sensitizing agent – some patients may experience dual responses, characterized by both early and late asthmatic responses.

New onset work-related asthma may occur due to sudden high dose irritant exposures. These workers may then have asthma exacerbations related to any environmental or occupational trigger. Work-related asthma may occur in workers with pre-existing asthma when they enter a new workplace or encounter a new substance in the workplace. Work-aggravated asthma includes sudden exacerbations of asthma or gradual increases in the dosages of medicine in association with exposures in the workplace.

**2. Worldwide Occurrence**

Work-related asthma is the most commonly diagnosed type of occupational lung disease in the United States and other developed countries. In the United States, an estimated 11 million workers are potentially exposed to one or more of the numerous agents currently known to be associated with the development of asthma.

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**B. METHODS OF CONTROL**

Patients with work-related asthma may require significant exposure reduction through product substitution or engineering controls, or possibly, permanent removal from the workplace.

***MORE INFORMATION***

Contact the Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) program at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries:

Telephone: 1-888-66-SHARP (1-888-667-4277)

Fax: 360-902-5672

Website: [www.lni.wa.gov/sharp](http://www.lni.wa.gov/sharp)